

United States Army Chaplain Center and School

THE NAVIGATORS

A Research Paper

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by

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Introduction

A growing number of religious organizations have come upon the military scene in recent years. Some of these groups have claimed to represent a certain denominational group, while others are nondenominational or interdenominational in character. Almost all these groups claim to have an interest in the spiritual welfare of the individual soldier. Perhaps the largest and most influential of the interdenominational groups has been The Navigators.

This organization began its work with the military man some forty years ago. In the words of their magazine:

The Navigators movement began in April 1933 when Dawson Trotman contacted a Christian sailor at San Pedro and dedicated himself to help this man grow to fruitful discipleship in Christ. This first sailor taught what he knew to a buddy, and under Trotman's guidance they reached others. Soon more than a hundred men on one ship and others on ships throughout the Fleet were living for Christ.¹

Since then their work has expanded to more than 150 bases in West Germany, Japan, South Korea, Okinawa, the Philippines, and the United States.²

¹"A Capsule History of The Navigators," The Navigators Log, July, 1972, p. 3.

²Monte C. Unger, "Why Military Men Are So Important," The Navigators Log, December, 1969, p. 3.

It is the purpose of this paper to discuss the Navigator organization and to make recommendations concerning their work in the Army community.

Basic Doctrines

If a theological classification had to be put on the Navigators it would need to include both conservative and evangelical aspects. The classification of conservative comes from a review of the doctrinal statement submitted by the headquarters of the organization. It is apparent from this statement that the group believes in such well-known conservative doctrines as the inspiration of Scripture, virgin birth of Christ, His bodily resurrection, His imminent return, resurrection of the just and unjust, and the existence of a literal heaven and hell.³

These doctrines are taught more by word of mouth and actual Bible study than by the publication of doctrinal statement. Many members of the organization may have never seen a formal doctrinal statement but they seem to have no doubt in their mind what the movement believes and stands for.⁴

The classification of evangelical comes from an overview of their purpose and approach. "Skip" Gray, director of the work in the United States and Canada, believes that

³The Navigators, "Doctrinal Statement," Colorado Springs, Colorado, n.d. (Mimeographed).

⁴Ken Graham, private interview held during a Navigators Conference, Whiting, New Jersey, 21 October 1973. (Ken Graham is a West Point graduate and former Army officer. He is now on full-time staff with the organization.)

the purpose of The Navigators is to help fulfill Christ's Great Commission by raising up disciples and disciplinermakers in every nation.⁵ By "raising up disciples" he means calling men to a personal commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and saviour.

Method of Operation

A knowledge of the movement's method of operation indicates its real uniqueness. This method, though simple, provides the key to the organization's continued success and growth. A Navigator pamphlet explains the essentials of this type of ministry:

The basic Navigator ministry is developed by a staff member who lives near a campus or base. He evangelizes until there are some converts and also seeks out other Christians interested in training.

The Navigators follow up initial contacts with intensive, personal 'man-to-man' and small group help, enabling the individual to grow into a more mature, Christ-centered Christian. The new Christian is encouraged to practice regular prayer habits, memorize Scripture, study and apply the Bible to his life and to relate to others his experience of becoming a Christian.⁶

In addition, conferences and training programs are held throughout the country. These are geared to teach the basics of the Christ-centered life.

⁵Letter from Philip "Skip" Gray, Navigator director for the United States and Canada, Oct. 19, 1973.

⁶The Navigators: An Explanation of the Organization and its Work (Colorado Springs, Colorado: The Navigators, 1973), p. 4.

This method is practically demonstrated on an Army post by visits to the barracks, snack bars, and areas of troop concentration. Through personal contacts, soldiers are asked about their own religious background and their personal relationship to Jesus Christ. Invitations are usually given to attend local Navigator Bible studies. From this beginning, each soldier that responds to the message is "discipled" and nurtured until he is able to start the process all over again.

Organizational Structure

The organizational structure can best be understood if the development of a person entering the program is followed. Since the organization is in a constant state of change, certain information concerning the structure may vary from year to year.

Once a person makes a personal commitment to Jesus Christ and enters into Navigator Bible study, he is said to be in his growth period. This period of from one to two years is accompanied by individual training conducted by the local staff member. Following this initial growth period, the individual spends the next two years as a disciplemaker. As this name indicated, he would be doing his best during this time to make disciples of those around him.

Further Navigator training would then be in order if the person is ready and willing to take the step. Normally this further training would take place in the home of a full-time staff member. If the individual is married, his

wife would also enter into this home experience. Centers have been established throughout the United States for this very purpose. The goal of this one- to two-year training period is to train the person to take a place of leadership in the Christian community. Why the Christian community and not a position with the Navigators? Of those who finish this step, approximately twenty-five per cent stay on Navigator staff. The rest go into other fields of Christian service.

A period for further training and maturity is provided by two- to three-years as a contact point on the regional staff. The person serving in this position wants to become a full time staff member but must prove himself by serving in a certain area under the guidance of an area representative. The staff of the organization is given a chance throughout this period to observe the skills and abilities of the individual concerned. Of those who finish this step, some ninety per cent go on to become full time staff members.

Becoming an area representative capable of being assigned anywhere in the world is the next rung on the ladder. The individual's growth to this point has taken on an average about eight years. An area representative is considered capable of training those who have been placed under him, such as contact point personnel.

The area representatives are, in turn, supervised by regional directors. Currently the United States and Canada

are divided into twelve regions, but these boundaries are constantly being re-drawn as staff members are added or responsibilities redefined.

Beyond the regional directors are the divisional directors. Their field of labor is divided into four divisions: United States and Canada, Europe and Africa, Pacific, and Latin America.

The whole organization is presided over by the president, Lorne Sanny. His responsibilities include overseeing the organization around the world. Further leadership comes from the Board of Directors and from Sanny's personal staff. Home office for the movement is situated in Colorado Springs, Colorado.⁷

Relationship to Established Chapel Programs

In past years it was not too uncommon in chaplain circles to hear complaints about Navigator activities. Some accused the Navigators of running counter to programs that local chaplains had established. They were sometimes viewed as members of another team working in a different direction. Although these clashes often came about because of a failure to establish communication between Navigator personnel and the military chaplains, a new age of cooperation seems to be dawning.

⁷Ken Graham during his personal interview covered these different aspects of organizational structure.

In the process of researching this paper numerous letters have been received from Army, Air Force, and Navy chaplains. All the letters testify to a new willingness on the part of The Navigators to cooperate with local religious programs. An example of such a letter comes from a chaplain at Fort Knox:

The Navigators have been meeting in my chapel for a number of years. . . . They do provide valuable assistance to my program with their weekly devotional and Bible study meetings. A number of their group are regular attendees at my Sunday services. . . .
 . . . I personally am happy and glad to have their group in my Chapel as a segment of my ministry to the single soldiers.⁸

Chaplains at Fort Meade consider the key to Navigator work to be their continued unqualified support of the chapel program.⁹

In some cases Navigator participants have become active in Army Sunday Schools. They have taken on the chores of teaching and superintending that some laymen are reluctant to fill. At other military posts they sponsor study and fellowship groups for young people.

This same spirit of cooperation and support has also been noted in Germany. Chaplain Moon notes:

My contact with the Navigators during my two years in Germany has been through Dean Meeker. He and his family are faithful members of my chapel congregation.

⁸Letter from Chaplain (MAJ) Mauno M. Kalliomaa, Headquarters 1st Training Brigade, Fort Knox, Kentucky, Nov. 8, 1973. (At the time of writing, twenty-two letters had been received from chaplains.)

⁹Letter from Chaplain (MAJ) Anthony W. Dick, Headquarters Fort George G. Meade, Fort Meade, Maryland, Nov. 8, 1973.

Dean Meeker has had my full support in working personally with soldiers on my post. In turn, he has channeled many young men into our chapel and has given us his own support. Recently, he assisted me in opening a Chapel-related Coffee House, and he and one of his colleagues are directly assisting in the actual operation, including a regular Bible study. He has also conducted services in our chapel several times.¹⁰

Recommendations

Certain value judgements must be made concerning the Navigator organization before recommendations can be offered. If their work is to be considered detrimental to the Army religious community, the recommendations will tend to go in a certain direction. If the work is viewed as helpful and beneficial, the recommendations will reflect a more positive approach.

Since the author has been called upon to make any recommendations that become apparent to him, research and personal experience must provide an answer. Research has revealed that in most cases the group has proved a valuable adjunct to the chaplain's religious program. Personal experience and observation based upon three different assignments have resulted in similar findings. The recommendations will, therefore, be slanted toward a positive use of the Navigator organization in military chapel circles.

First of all, clear and concise information concerning the movement and its methods (similar to that provided in this

¹⁰Letter from Chaplain (MAJ) Austin D. Moon, Headquarters 4th Transportation Battalion, APO 09154, Nov. 6, 1973.

paper) should be disseminated to every chaplain in the field. This could be accomplished by the Office of the Chief of Chaplains or by the Chaplains Board. Although this yet-to-be written report should not provide blanket endorsement for the organization, it could provide the chaplain in the field helpful information in working with and evaluating the group.

Second, post chaplains should be fully aware of the Navigator work taking place on their post and who the Navigator representatives are in their area. Unfortunately, many post chaplains do not know what work is being carried on by the Navigators on their post. Both sides must share the blame for this. Sometimes the Navigator personnel do not keep the chaplain's office informed as to their complete activities. On other occasions, the post chaplain fails to keep himself informed. The burden for keeping this communication channel open would seem to lie more with the Navigators than with the post chaplain.

Third, the post chaplains should establish broad policies and procedures for working with this group on their particular post. These policies will necessarily be different from post to post because men and Army missions vary a great deal. This step is necessary if the local unit chaplain is to know just how much leeway he has in working with the group as it appears in his area.

The policies should also contain a section on the use of military facilities. Vague Army regulations dealing with

the use of military facilities for religious purposes make such policy statements necessary.¹¹

Fourth, Religious Education chaplains and directors should consider using Navigator trained personnel as teacher trainers, Sunday School teachers, and youth workers. As noted earlier in the paper, many Navigator personnel have advanced training as Christian leaders. They can provide valuable assistance to the religious education program.

Finally, unit chaplains need to evaluate their own program in the light of what The Navigators can do to help it. The chaplain should ask himself the following questions: How can The Navigators help me in my unit and chapel? Where can they complement my present program? How can they assist in establishing new programs or studies? This recommendation is the key to Navigator program success on military posts because ultimate supervision of religious activities is accomplished by the unit chaplain.

Conclusion

The military chaplain is faced with a great responsibility as he endeavors to meet the needs of the military community. He is sometimes surprised to find that there are others outside the military structure that are working toward some of the same goals. The Navigators through word and deed can achieve many of these goals. A new spirit of cooperation

¹¹For further information see AR 210-115, "Religious Facilities and Material," 29 November 1968, Section II, para.5; and AR 165-20, "Duties of Chaplains and Commanders' Responsibilities," 22 August 1972, para. 8.

between the Navigator staff member and the chaplain must prevail. Close working relationships have to be established. If, however, the chaplain is threatened by the presence of the Navigators, the aims of both will be thwarted. We should learn to work together in the spirit of Him who sent us to accomplish this great task.

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